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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 486th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 8 October 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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Protection

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

Adoption of the report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection (A/AC.96/819)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited Mr. Lanus, Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection, to introduce the Sub-Committee's report (A/AC.96/819).
2. Mr. LANUS (Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection) said that the Sub-Committee had dealt with a number of important issues, in particular those discussed in the annual Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815), as well as with several documents pertaining to UNHCR policy on refugee children (EC/SCP/82), guidelines on the protection aspects of voluntary repatriation (EC/SCP/80), the evaluation by the Secretary-General of the UNHCR programme on international protection of and assistance to refugees (E/AC.51/1993/2) and UNHCR's activities for refugee law promotion, dissemination and training (EC/SCP/78). In view of the considerable changes at the world level that had to be faced by UNHCR and individual countries, discussions in the Sub-Committee had centred on the major topics of asylum, prevention and solutions and had focused on the search for strategies and measures of effectively ensuring the international protection of persons who needed it. Many delegations had stressed the need for global and integrated approaches to resolving today's increasingly complex and far-reaching refugee problems. Lastly, the Sub-Committee had endeavoured to improve the wording of the draft conclusions on personal security of refugees and on refugee women and sexual violence which would be submitted to the Executive Committee for adoption following the final approval of their texts by the Friends of the Rapporteur.
3. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee adopted the report of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection (A/AC.96/819).
4. It was so decided.
5. Mr. DEMEKSA (Ethiopia) said that the growing complexity of the issue of international protection and new and increasing demands in that area created an urgent need to review the effectiveness of traditional measures and to encourage helpful attitudes through the promotion of mass education. Other urgent tasks were the promotion of refugee and returnee participation in decision-making and the designing of appropriate schemes linking relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, with special emphasis on women, children and the environment. Measures that effectively addressed the need for durable solutions needed further exploration. Priority requirements had to be determined and available resources efficiently utilized through the coordination of humanitarian assistance efforts. The competence of national Governments in dealing with migration and refugee flows also had to be enhanced.

6. In his own country, where peace and stability now prevailed, 500,000 Ethiopian refugees had been voluntarily repatriated, while, at the same time, refugees from other countries were taking refuge in Ethiopia. That picture was unlikely to change in the near future. His Government had taken the initiative of bringing the warring parties in Somalia together in an effort to seek the political solutions without which the unprecedented population movements across borders could not be halted. It had generally adopted a cross-mandate approach, dealing in a coordinated manner with the basic needs of groups requiring emergency assistance, as well as of those affected by prolonged war and other calamities. In that way, it hoped to pave the way for cost-effective activities linking relief, recovery and initial reconstruction to sustainable development from which all parties would benefit.

7. The undertaking was, however, unlikely to bear fruit unless it was supported by regional mechanisms. Accordingly, his Government, in collaboration with neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa, had convened two conferences - one on humanitarian assistance and the other on relief, drought rehabilitation and cooperation - to address emergencies and environmental degradation which hindered progress. The assistance of the international community had without any doubt been of great value, but it was unfortunately incommensurate with the magnitude of the problems created by recurrent droughts and other man-made and natural calamities. He appealed to the international community to adopt global strategies that would comprehensively and cost-effectively meet the basic needs of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons in the Horn of Africa, with a special focus on women and children.

8. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) said that the project for the repatriation of Afghan refugees launched after the signing of the Geneva Accords in July 1990 and the establishment of a Mujahideen Government in Afghanistan in April 1992 had enabled over 1.5 million Afghans to leave Pakistan and return to their country by 31 December 1992. The hope of seeing a further 1 million refugees return to Afghanistan in 1993 had, however, been disappointed owing to the presence of large numbers of land mines, the breakdown of the physical infrastructure, the collapse of the agricultural system and the virtual absence of economic activity. Even the revised target of 300,000 repatriations now seemed to be a difficult proposition in view of a fresh influx of about 95,000 refugees, including a large percentage of those previously repatriated.

9. His Government hoped that the establishment of a tripartite commission following the agreement signed by Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR in Islamabad in August 1993, together with the High Commissioner's recent visit to Pakistan, would help set the voluntary repatriation process back on track. Material incentives were also important. Regrettably, the encashment programme which was jointly financed by UNHCR and WFP and whose purpose was to help refugee families return to their homes by partially meeting their transportation charges and enabling them to sustain themselves for some months by means of an allowance equal to US\$ 110 and 300 kilograms of wheat was still insufficient. In collaboration with other United Nations agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR might consider providing almost wholly subsidized transport to returning refugee families and granting them more extensive assistance in the form of tents, kerosene oil, agricultural seeds and implements.

10. Despite its own economic constraints, his Government had continuously provided relief assistance to Afghan refugees for the past 14 years. The generous support given by UNHCR and donor countries was now diminishing, although 1.5 million Afghan refugees were still present in Pakistan. The decrease was seriously affecting the overall relief assistance programme, compelling the authorities to cancel some otherwise important projects in sectors such as skill development and veterinary care and to introduce large-scale staff retrenchment in refugee organizations. His Government strongly urged UNHCR to use its influence to reverse that trend.

11. The protracted presence of Afghan refugees and their livestock in Pakistan had caused substantial ecological damage to vast areas of the country. In 1990, UNDP had identified various development projects for the affected areas. His Government was confident that the donor community realized the gravity of the situation and would help it launch the planned projects. Since 1984, his Government had been conducting an income-generating project for refugee-affected areas covering forestry, watershed management, irrigation, flood protection and communications. The first and second phases of the project, costing US\$ 60 million, had produced tangible results in the affected areas and had provided job opportunities for a significant number of Afghan refugees. His Government therefore strongly urged that regular funding should be provided for the third phase, which was to cost US\$ 26.6 million.

12. It was equally important that economic recovery and rehabilitation activities should be vigorously and urgently undertaken in Afghanistan. In particular, the action plan for immediate rehabilitation identified by UNDP needed to be speedily implemented and agricultural activities brought up at least to the pre-war level. He hoped that the international community would continue to support his country as well as Afghanistan in their joint efforts on behalf of Afghan refugees.

13. Mr. URRUTIA (Observer for Peru) said that he had taken note with satisfaction of the results recently achieved by UNHCR within the framework of various refugee protection and repatriation operations. In that connection, the Concerted Plan of Action of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) of May 1989 was an example of efficient cooperation in humanitarian activities. The success of the Plan of Action had made the international community aware of fresh difficulties, especially that of returnee reintegration, which once again required the cooperation of all concerned.

14. As a result of the far-reaching changes which had taken place in the world in the past few years, the traditional military threat to international security had been replaced by dangers of a new kind. The countries of Latin America, including his own, which had been confronted for decades by the enormous problems of bringing about development and combating poverty, now had to cope with terrorism and its attendant acts of violence. In addition to causing material damage to Peru's economy, the unleashing of terrorism had created massive population displacements within the country; terrorist gangs had gone so far as to exterminate an indigenous group of the Ashaninka tribe who had opposed their insane activities. Flows of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons were hampering the Government's efforts to relaunch the Peruvian economy and re-establish peace in the country with full

respect for democratic principles and human rights. Above all, the population flows were causing enormous economic and social problems which the national authorities could not solve without the international community's support and cooperation.

15. He welcomed the constructive and realistic way in which the High Commissioner looked at the action UNHCR had to take to deal with those new challenges and, in particular, the problem of internally displaced persons. He noted with interest that many States at the current session of the Executive Committee had urged that bodies such as UNHCR should respond appropriately, flexibly and realistically to those challenges. In the same spirit, his Government had decided to submit an official request for UNHCR assistance in coping with the problems caused by massive population movements inside the country. It would continue to support the work being done by the High Commissioner and to take an active part in devising solutions that reflected the political will of the international community while guaranteeing UNHCR the necessary flexibility in the performance of its task.

16. Mr. CHEBROT (Uganda) said that the global refugee situation had hardly improved despite everything UNHCR was doing to assist displaced persons and refugees, often in very delicate situations. The international community was therefore under a moral obligation to continue to facilitate UNHCR's efforts to fulfil its mandate. At the same time, everything should be done to resolve the causes of conflict in the areas concerned and, where necessary, to bring pressure to bear on the offending parties by denying them the capacity to prolong the conflict.

17. He fully recognized the efforts made by UNHCR in effectively responding to major emergency situations and in implementing voluntary repatriation and reintegration programmes in several African countries. His delegation welcomed the recent signing of an agreement between UNHCR and South Africa which would enable organized voluntary repatriation to be undertaken in safety and dignity.

18. He noted that UNHCR had responded to the request for assistance addressed to it by his Government the previous year by dispatching a mission to review the Sudanese refugee programme. His Government was anxious that the local populations of refugee-receiving areas should also benefit from refugee assistance programmes. The project in the Masindi district aimed at strengthening the local socio-economic infrastructure would no doubt increase the district's absorption capacity and facilitate the refugees' integration and was a model that might well be emulated elsewhere in the country.

19. At the moment, the refugee situation in Uganda involved two scenarios: on the one hand, over 90,000 Rwandese refugees, most of whom were living in settlements located in south-western Uganda, were preparing for repatriation; on the other hand, over 47,000 Sudanese refugees had entered north-western Uganda since August 1993, when the country had already had over 100,000 Sudanese refugees. The total number of refugees in Uganda was estimated at 350,000 persons, including over 50,000 who had recently arrived from Zaire, Somalia and other countries.

20. Apart from the grave implications of those two movements for Uganda's resources and environment, the situation could be exacerbated by the increase in the number of urban Somali refugees, Zairians and refugees of other nationalities. It was therefore absolutely necessary that UNHCR, which was mandated to seek permanent solutions to refugee problems, should promote the early repatriation of Rwandese refugees and mobilize international support for an assistance development package for the areas formerly occupied by them. The problem of Sudanese refugees had also become a matter of grave concern to his Government because of its socio-economic, political and security implications for the country. His Government could not, in the long term, afford to go on allocating land for the settlement of refugees.

21. The north-western border of Uganda had been bombed on a number of occasions following the entry of large numbers of Sudanese refugees and the problems of people living close to the border were compounded by the scarcity of facilities and the inadequacy of social services that had to be shared with the refugees. His delegation appealed to the United Nations to encourage a dialogue between the Sudanese Government and the various SPLA factions in order to bring about an early conclusion of a conflict that had lasted so long and been so costly in terms of human lives.

22. With the best will in the world, the existing agencies in his country were unable to cope with the situation and it was therefore imperative that the donor community should, in a spirit of solidarity, give greater support to the relevant agencies to enable them to deal effectively with the refugee situation in northern Uganda. His delegation also stressed the need for UNHCR and other agencies to ensure the equitable allocation of resources to host countries, taking due account of the impact of refugee inflows on those countries and of the size of the refugee populations involved.

23. He paid a tribute to the various agencies assisting refugees in his country, in particular, UNHCR, WFP, Médecins sans frontières (Switzerland, France and Netherlands), the Lutheran World Federation, the Red Cross of Uganda, UNICEF and the Inter-Aid and Refugee Department of the Church of Uganda, and assured UNHCR of his Government's commitment to the search for a lasting solution to the refugee problem.

24. Mr. NGUYEN LUONG (Observer for Viet Nam) expressed his country's admiration for everything the High Commissioner had done for refugees, displaced persons and asylum-seekers during the past year. On behalf of the Vietnamese Government, he took note of the positive reactions to the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, an initiative to which Viet Nam had contributed to the full extent of its ability. Reaffirming his Government's commitment to prevent illegal departures by all available means and to encourage regular and orderly departures in cooperation with the host countries, he expressed the hope that the reintegration of refugees from Viet Nam would be accomplished with full respect for humanitarian considerations. Aware of the difficulties experienced by first-asylum countries, Viet Nam was prepared to cooperate in the search for mutually acceptable solutions.

25. Viet Nam also undertook to continue making efforts to promote voluntary repatriation and the economic and social reintegration of returnees with full

respect for the dignity and safety of the persons involved and with the help of the international community. He took the opportunity to express his country's thanks to donor countries and, first and foremost, to the European Community, as well as to first-asylum countries, for their cooperation and assistance, which it hoped to continue enjoying in the future in connection with the refugees' reintegration.

26. The progress achieved in the conclusion of agreements between Viet Nam and Hong Kong on the repatriation of screened-out refugees had given powerful impetus to the search for similar solutions with other countries in the region. Thus, discussions between Viet Nam, Indonesia and UNHCR had led to the conclusion of an agreement on measures aimed at solving the problem of illegal arrivals of Vietnamese nationals in Indonesia. With regard to the refugees who had left Viet Nam for China in 1979 and 90 per cent of whom were, according to UNHCR, of Chinese origin, he was firmly convinced that the agreement reached by the two countries' highest authorities in 1991 to consider the matter bilaterally had been a happy initiative. In conclusion, he said that Viet Nam was prepared to work together with the member countries of the Steering Committee of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in preparing the forthcoming meeting of that body.

27. Mr. HUSSEIN (Observer for Iraq), congratulating Mrs. Ogata on her opening statement, said that everyone was aware of the magnitude of the world's refugee problems and of the seriousness of a situation that could no longer be handled by the traditional solutions of providing financial assistance to the Office of the High Commissioner or directly to the refugees themselves. Important as it was, that solution was no substitute for the more radical one of repatriation. The key to the refugee problem lay in the political will of States and in their readiness to abandon the pursuit of doubtful political ends.

28. It was regrettable that some countries which displayed extraordinary interest in the situation of certain refugees to the exclusion of others refused to recognize that, because of their influence, their capacities and the fact that they had encouraged certain refugee flows, it was they themselves that held the solution to the refugee problem. His delegation felt some bitterness about the question of refugees because Iraq was continuing to suffer the effects of a deliberate policy one of whose objectives was to perpetuate the presence of large numbers of Iraqis outside the country in order to exploit them for political ends, namely, the destabilization of Iraq and interference in its domestic affairs.

29. Allowing that the Gulf War had been at the origin of the first refugee flow, it had to be recognized that the situation today was entirely different, since the Iraqi Government had promulgated amnesty measures and granted facilities which had persuaded most of the refugees to return to their home country without fear of administrative or judicial prosecution. Only those under pressure from certain States or those who had received promises which stood in the way of a definitive solution of the problem were still abroad. The humiliations and ill-treatment inflicted by the military authorities on refugees whose sole offence had been to ask for a minimum of refugee rights

had been amply reported by the media. It was regrettable that UNHCR, although fully aware of that situation, had disappointed the refugees' expectations by failing to take any positive steps.

30. One of the main reasons for the non-return of Iraqi citizens to their country was the economic embargo which continued to be imposed on Iraq. Hearing of the sufferings endured by the people as a result of the embargo, some refugees hesitated to return home. The ideal solution to the problem would therefore be to lift the embargo, for which there was no longer any legal or moral justification. In that connection, it had to be stressed that, despite the dramatic effects of the embargo on the Iraqi people and the difficulties which the Government had to face in order to meet the basic needs of its citizens, Iraq continued to bear the enormous costs of the presence of Iranian refugees in its territory.

31. The presence of a UNHCR office in Baghdad was indispensable, since it offered a possibility of dialogue between the Iraqi Government and the Office of the High Commissioner. Iraq hoped, however, that UNHCR would play a more active role in persuading other States to grant the right of asylum to refugees, especially Iranian refugees now in Iraq. Likewise, it hoped that the Office of the High Commissioner would urge the Iranian authorities to agree to the repatriation of Iranian refugees wishing to return to their country; the refugees in question could not be regarded as political refugees, since all they had done was to flee the inferno of a war that was now over. Iraq also hoped that UNHCR would instruct its Baghdad office to provide better services at the Iranian refugee camp of Al-Tash in the province of Al-Anbar, and, in particular, to equip that camp with water pumps, since Iraq's own economic situation did not allow it to be as generous as it might wish. Lastly, he said that his country appreciated the High Commissioner's efforts to fulfil her mandate and hoped that UNHCR would contribute to the lifting of the economic embargo.

32. Mr. DEMBINSKI (Observer for Poland) said that despite the hopes raised by the ending of the cold war, unprecedented demands had been placed on UNHCR during the past year. Both old and new challenges had been successfully met and his delegation paid a special tribute to Mrs. Ogata for combining a personal concern for human misery with efficient management of a complex and expanding organization.

33. There had been progress in the implementation of the components of the strategic plan for UNHCR, namely, the capacity for emergency response, preventive protection and voluntary repatriation. During the past year, some refugee situations had been resolved and the refugees had been able to return home. The situation in the former Yugoslavia, where UNHCR was working under extremely trying circumstances, deserved particular mention.

34. In her Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815), the High Commissioner formulated guidelines for UNHCR action in such situations. Poland basically shared the High Commissioner's views in that regard. However, the influx of asylum-seekers without a valid claim called for new mechanisms and closer international cooperation in order to maintain the viability of the asylum institution. The steps taken by most countries to prevent illegal migration and to avoid abuse of asylum procedures could not be

allowed to affect individuals genuinely in need of protection. The introduction in several countries of increasingly restrictive policies towards asylum-seekers and refugees and the rapid implementation of the so-called "third safe country" concept appeared to be having a serious impact on the international system of refugee protection. It was the Executive Committee's duty to examine the situation created by the adoption and implementation of such policies, whether common or individual.

35. Referring to document EC/1993/SCP/CRP.6 entitled "Informed decision-making in protection: the role of information", he stressed the important role of information strategy in ensuring international protection and avoiding serious abuses of the procedure for determining refugee status. His delegation was keenly interested in the development of an information-sharing system by the Centre for Documentation on Refugees (CDR) and strongly supported the country-oriented approach and the possibility to access the CDR databases.

36. Poland welcomed UNHCR's efforts to improve the situation of refugee women and children. In that context, it noted with gratification the progress made by UNHCR in revising the 1988 Guidelines on Refugee Children and strongly urged States to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The influence of the Office of the UNHCR Coordinator for Refugee Women should be preserved and systematically extended to UNHCR activities in the field.

37. Notwithstanding its limited possibilities, Poland had offered hospitality to some 900 children from the former Yugoslavia, often accompanied by their mothers and teachers. A number of Polish hospitals and health care facilities had offered medical care to sick and wounded children from Sarajevo. The involvement of Polish non-governmental organizations in refugee protection and care efforts was impressive. Against that background, it had to be borne in mind that most refugees entering Poland hoped to go to one of the western European countries and regarded Poland merely as a transit route. Those who failed to move on felt trapped in Poland and their growing frustration was indicative of the complexity of the problems which the Polish authorities had to face. His country strongly deplored and condemned the policy and practice of so-called "ethnic cleansing" and welcomed the establishment of the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

38. In addition to political factors, the refugee problem had economic and social causes connected with poverty, malnutrition and underdevelopment. It was the international community's duty to take account of forced economic migrations and to seek practical means of coping with them. A broad approach, ranging from prevention to the promotion of economic progress, democracy and human rights, was called for. In conclusion, he said that Poland would fully cooperate with UNHCR in its humanitarian mission.

39. U TIN KYAW HLAING (Observer for Myanmar) recalled that Mrs. Ogata had visited Myanmar from 28 to 31 July 1993 at the invitation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of his country to discuss with some of the country's leading personalities the framework of the assistance to be provided by UNHCR for the returnees from Bangladesh. Following Mrs. Ogata's visit, a 10-member technical mission led by Mr. Blatter, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania, had visited Myanmar from 4 to 16 September 1993.

Discussions between the members of the mission and the Myanmar authorities concerned were reported to have been fruitful and, before long, the two sides would undoubtedly be able to put in place the mechanisms for implementing programmes in the humanitarian field.

40. His delegation expressed its sincere and deep appreciation to Mrs. Ogata and all members of the UNHCR staff, especially those of the Regional Bureau for Asia and Oceania, for their friendship, understanding and goodwill towards Myanmar.

41. Prince SOBANDLA DLAMINI (Observer for Swaziland) said that the solution to the refugee problem was not the granting of asylum, with all that it entailed, but the avoidance of conditions leading to that human calamity. While UNHCR, non-governmental organizations and donors were trying to alleviate the problem, the vast number of refugees around the world was still increasing, with unfortunate repercussions for the host countries. Without the assistance of UNHCR, non-governmental organizations and donors, Swaziland would not be able to assist the refugees living in its territory. However, the financial situation of the Office of the High Commissioner left little room for optimism.

42. A few weeks previously, Swaziland, Mozambique and UNHCR had signed a tripartite agreement for the voluntary repatriation of Mozambicans. In order to be able to go home and lead decent lives, those returnees would need certain essentials which Mozambique was not at present in a position to provide. It was therefore to be hoped that the international community would assist the repatriation process by supporting the creation of a reasonable infrastructure in Mozambique. With that end in view, the Head of State of Swaziland, King Mswati III, had invited the Head of State of the Republic of Mozambique and the High Commissioner to a ceremony to be held shortly to inaugurate the repatriation process.

43. The number of returnees from Swaziland would be in excess of the official figure because a number of spontaneous refugees living among Swazi communities had not yet been registered for voluntary repatriation. He hoped that the budget for that programme would take account of those excess numbers. Furthermore, his Government had on several occasions requested transport to ensure the efficient implementation of the repatriation process and hoped that the request would receive favourable consideration by UNHCR.

44. Swaziland also continued to host early refugees from South Africa who had already attained self-sufficiency. However, the recent drought had adversely affected their cotton crop and it would be helpful if the urgent provision of food to those refugees could be made on the same basis as to the others. Swaziland had also received a new influx of refugees from other parts of Africa and Asia and would be grateful if provision could be made for them.

45. At the forty-third session of the Executive Committee, his delegation had drawn attention to the need for special programmes for refugee women and children and it noted with appreciation that the idea had received support in the Executive Committee and hoped that the programme instituted in Swaziland would receive funding. As every intelligent person realized, human beings

were different from one another and had to try to find what they had in common in order to live together in dignity. The confidence and trust of the powerless and less fortunate made that a sacred duty.

46. When the outgoing Chairman of the Executive Committee had toured the refugee camps, none of the refugees or displaced persons he had met had asked him for money, but had only wanted to know when they could return home. He too had seen such faces and heard such words among the refugees in Swaziland. How many more such words would need to be spoken before the humanitarian mission was completed? Answers to the refugee problem were doubtless difficult to find, but it was the duty of all those present to seek those answers unless they wanted to have lived their lives in vain.

47. Mr. MALLOW (Observer for Djibouti) said that the members of the Executive Committee could only note that there had been a clear deterioration in the refugee situation throughout the world and watch helplessly as increasing numbers of conflicts forced hundreds of thousands of human beings, especially women and children, into exile. The situation was becoming intolerable and called for greater efforts and solidarity. Although it was true that no continent was spared by the phenomenon, Africa, which was already grappling with serious socio-economic and political difficulties was the continent that hosted the largest number of refugees as a result of the conflicts which were tearing apart Angola and Somalia in particular. The resources placed at the continent's disposal must therefore be increased.

48. For its part, Djibouti had always been a land of asylum, despite its meagre resources. It had received more than 150,000 refugees in its territory. That figure represented 28 per cent of its population and the situation constituted a major risk for the country's stability and an unbearable burden on its fragile social infrastructures. While continuing to pursue a policy of openness, Djibouti requested the international community to look after the thousands of human beings who had taken to living in the streets and were transforming the capital of Djibouti into a vast refugee camp. The settlement that was taking shape in Somalia thanks to the intervention of the United Nations and the normalization that was occurring in Ethiopia gave ground for hope that the number of refugees arriving would stabilize and that they would be voluntarily repatriated to their countries of origin. Djibouti was also in favour of extending UNHCR's assistance to persons displaced outside or inside their own country, since such a preventive policy could check the flow of arriving refugees.

49. The concepts of international protection and humanitarian law had been severely tested in 1992 and 1993 and it was becoming more and more difficult to provide assistance and protection to the victims of refugee situations. Among those victims, the most vulnerable groups were subjected to ill-treatment and humiliations which added to their poverty and privations. In particular, women and children were often the victims of rape or sexual violence, additional wounds inflicted on beings whose suffering was already at the limit of what was bearable. Action must be taken to put an end to such odious acts, wherever they occurred, especially in the case of the Somali refugees in Kenya. The international community owed protection not only to refugees, but also to those who looked after them. Djibouti shared the High Commissioner's concern about the safety of her staff and of the staff of

other humanitarian organizations working in the field. It paid a tribute to the altruism of those men and women faced with such certainties and perils.

50. The voluntary repatriation of refugees was undoubtedly the most appropriate solution. However, the refugees had to be able to be reintegrated and to resume normal lives. In the absence of specific projects to create the economic conditions that would enable refugees to look after themselves in the short term, repatriation would only be a costly and ineffective exercise. The High Commissioner had pointed out that refugees often returned to regions where the infrastructure had been destroyed. She had also pointed out that too many repatriation operations were suffering from a shortage of funds. The international community should therefore pay all the necessary attention to that issue. The multiplication of conflicts throughout the world required that more resources and funds should be allotted to assisting countries of asylum weakened by inflows of refugees and displaced persons.

51. Djibouti associated itself with all those countries that were anxious to do more to settle conflicts. International solidarity must be strengthened so that the victims of man's madness could be assisted, but the burden represented by such assistance must be equitably shared between countries of asylum and donor countries.

52. Mr. NYANGOMA (Observer for Burundi) said that, for the first time in Burundi since 1966, pluralist democratic elections had been organized - presidential elections on 1 June 1993 and parliamentary elections on 29 June. The possibility of changing the Government through the ballot box, which the people of Burundi had wanted for almost 30 years, had thus been realized. The open-minded Government which had been established had committed itself to solving the ethnic and regional conflicts that had plunged the country into mourning for more than a quarter of a century. Those conflicts were at the origin of the existence of approximately 240,000 refugees from Burundi who lived mainly in the neighbouring countries of Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire, but also in other countries such as Switzerland, Belgium, France and Canada. At present, most refugees from Burundi had expressed a desire to return to their native country. More than 10,000 of them had already been repatriated over the past two months. The task of the new Government of Burundi was difficult, since it had to establish the conditions necessary for the reception and settlement of the 25,000 persons whose repatriation to Burundi had been scheduled since the beginning of the year, to whom must be added all the refugees who had decided to return following the political changes that had taken place in June 1993. The Government of Burundi welcomed the High Commissioner's sound decision to give priority to the voluntary repatriation solution and was in favour of the formulation of guidelines for voluntary repatriation undertaken by UNHCR.

53. Burundi was very sensitive to the financial difficulties which UNHCR was currently having to face. Consequently, his delegation associated itself with the Swiss delegation, which had recommended that activities should be undertaken in order of priority. His delegation shared the High Commissioner's disappointment that no solution had yet been found for the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and that only meagre progress had been made in the repatriation of refugees to Eritrea and other areas in the Horn of Africa.

54. Burundi had created favourable political conditions for the return of its refugees, but the most serious constraints were economic in nature. Since most refugees from Burundi were peasant farmers and stock breeders, the land question was of prime importance. The lands still available would be more than sufficient to absorb the refugees from Burundi, estimated by UNHCR to number 206,000, provided that they were developed. The greatest challenge for the new Government of Burundi was thus to develop the lands in question and to create the conditions for the reception and economic and social integration of the repatriated refugees. It was nevertheless important to assess how much time would reasonably be needed to put such infrastructures into place: unless attention was paid to that point now, the refugees would return spontaneously and no one would be able to foresee their reactions. Such reflections were not merely hypothetical, but were based on the findings of information missions recently undertaken in refugee camps in Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire. When the missions had been completed, the Government of Burundi had drawn up an emergency plan of action for the repatriation of 50,000 persons in six months. It thus hoped to give itself time to create the conditions for the reception of the refugees who were under the least pressure to return.

55. It should also be pointed out that refugees from Burundi were anxious to recover the lands and houses which they had abandoned when they had fled. That was a prior condition which they had always put forward for their repatriation. The Government had undertaken to settle the land question outside any political context, on a case-by-case basis. Burundi was aware that, on its own, it could never cope with the repatriation of its refugees. The international community, particularly UNHCR and the countries of asylum, must join in the work. If necessary, the Government would revise its repatriation programme accordingly. The problem could then be solved in a maximum period of three years. He associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania and recommended that the question of repatriation in the two fraternal countries in the Great Lakes subregion - Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania - should not be treated separately.

56. Within the limits of its possibilities, the Government of Burundi would support UNHCR's activities to help refugees. Furthermore, Burundi wished to associate itself with the work of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection and the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters.

57. Mr. COX (Commission of the European Community) said that, in the cooperation between the Commission of the European Community and UNHCR during the past 12 months, first place had been held by assistance to the victims of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. At the meeting of the Working Group that had been held in Geneva on 16 July 1993, the Director of the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) had recalled that the European Community had thus far provided \$870 million or, in other words, 68 per cent of all the international aid supplied to the victims and that, of that amount, \$370 million had been placed at the disposal of UNHCR. He had also announced that additional aid in an amount of \$75 million was due to be voted, of which a substantial proportion would be made available to UNHCR. The Community would continue that effort, although the funds earmarked for that purpose in

its 1993 budget had been exhausted. Consequently, economies would be made in other budget lines in response to the call made by the High Commissioner and other partners, particularly with a view to meeting the needs of refugees during the coming winter.

58. In July, the representative of the Commission had also called for better cooperation and coordination on the ground. Since then, the Commission was pleased to have been invited to participate in the inter-agency joint evaluation for the October appeal. A joint effort to secure transparency and accuracy was the best way to strengthen cooperation and provide better planning of contributions paid in response to appeals for funds.

59. In addition to the action it was taking in Yugoslavia, the Community had contributed to humanitarian relief efforts in some 35 countries throughout the world. The Community could finance various activities to help refugees, including displaced persons, in repatriation, "post emergency" relief or reintegration. Thus, under the regional programme to fund projects to aid refugees in Asia, approximately \$31 million had gone to UNHCR in 1992 - in other words, a little under one half of the budget resources available. A slightly smaller amount had been released for the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), in close cooperation with UNHCR. In the African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries parties to the Lomé Convention, the Community had provided funds amounting to some \$400 million over a period of four years. An important meeting was due to be held in Brussels between the European Community and those countries, at which UNHCR would be represented.

60. For the implementation of that aid, the prime partners were still the NGOs and the agencies of the United Nations system. The European Community had cooperated with UNHCR in relief work for refugees in various theatres of conflict, including Liberia, Mozambique, Angola and Somalia. Elsewhere, in the conflict zones of the former USSR, the Community, besides its own actions, was sharing with UNHCR the difficult task of sending international humanitarian aid specialists to regions formerly closed to them. The list of the different theatres involved bore witness to the interest which the European Community was taking in refugee matters, its duty to take on its share of international humanitarian relief efforts and its determination to work with the most competent partners. In order to facilitate partnership relations, the Commission had prepared a standard form of partnership agreement, which replaced the different procedures used in the past. So far, it had signed such agreements first with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and, subsequently, with over 60 NGOs and other prominent partners making exceptional efforts in the field of humanitarian relief. It wished to conclude agreements of the same kind with United Nations agencies, in particular with UNHCR. Meanwhile, it was seeking to maintain normal working relations with them. The purpose was to introduce more transparency, structure and consistency into those relations.

61. For UNHCR as for ECHO, humanitarian action was by definition limited in time or at least ought to be. Nevertheless, there was great concern, particularly among NGOs, about the arrangements to be made for rehabilitation once conflicts ceased. In the particular case of Yugoslavia, ECHO was already contemplating the post-war situation. For the coming winter, joint ECHO/UNHCR initiatives were already scheduled in matters of shelter, energy

and infrastructure. It would then be necessary to see what other tasks needed to be fulfilled. Rehabilitation did not, strictly speaking, form part of either ECHO's or UNHCR's mandates. Both bodies jointly assumed responsibility for the first steps in that direction. Later, it would be up to those skilled in development work to take over. Nevertheless, the European Commission was not sure who would then be the main actor in the United Nations system or how the necessary coordination mechanisms would function. That question seemed quite urgent to the European Commission, which would like to see it attended to without delay. In any case, the Commission of the European Community greatly valued its close cooperation with UNHCR in the international efforts to bring relief to victims of conflict and disaster.

62. Ms. ZAK (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) acknowledged the progress achieved during the past year on refugee programmes across the globe and paid a tribute to the work done by the High Commissioner to foster wide-ranging cooperation between the agencies involved. The Federation, its national societies and their staff, both full-time members and volunteers, were in a strong position to contribute to the humanitarian effort on behalf of refugees, in close cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In view of the shortfall in resources available for problems of dimensions such as those of the former Yugoslavia or Somalia, the humanitarian effort required better coordination and the more efficient use of resources. In many countries, Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies were the only structures that had a network reaching into the communities. The Federation helped the national societies to mobilize significant resources effectively and rapidly and encouraged them to work together to respond to emergencies and pursue durable solutions, as was now the case with the national societies in Mozambique and Malawi.

63. The partnership established between UNHCR and the Federation must be extended to the planning of large operations, the optimum division of resources and the adoption of agreed strategies. The Federation welcomed the idea of inter-agency assessment missions coordinated by the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs and was keen to participate further. Those exercises must continue to be well prepared, focused on refugee needs rather than donor deadlines and open for the necessary adjustments. The Federation also believed that the situation reports of UNHCR should fully reflect the contribution of all the parties involved.

64. In reviewing the past year, a number of long-standing areas of concern had been identified, including that of the boat people. The protection of refugees in certain newly independent States of the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, inter alia, required urgent attention. UNHCR planned to focus more intensively on that problem and its increased presence in the region would be highly welcome to the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies concerned, which, with the Federation's support and in difficult logistic situations, were regularly delivering relief to the needy. The conflict in that region had, unfortunately, overshadowed vital needs elsewhere and other matters affecting the welfare of refugees. Such was the case with the scourge of AIDS, from which many refugees were now suffering or to which they were exposed. The Federation urged the High Commissioner to implement the guidelines developed in 1988. Measures to avert the pandemic should be

applied to refugees as part of existing national programmes and policies. The right to seek and enjoy asylum, a basic human right, could not be undermined by the exclusion of individuals affected by HIV or AIDS.

65. The training courses in refugee law were an important contribution to the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers and were perfectly in line with the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Federation encouraged all its member societies to advocate the application of the instruments on refugee law and on international humanitarian law. It fully supported UNHCR's initiative to revitalize its ties with the NGO community through the PARINAC ("Partnership in Action") process, which would give UNHCR additional opportunities for listening to the views of grassroots organizations. The promotion of action at the regional level on such matters as voluntary repatriation and emergency preparedness was also of great value and ways of easing the sacrifices and stresses often faced by the local host population must be pursued urgently. The Federation looked forward to continuing its partnership with UNHCR as an essential element of its strategic challenge of improving the situation of the most vulnerable.

66. Mr. LAMUNIERE (United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs) said that the 18 million individuals throughout the world who had had no other choice but exile imposed an increasingly heavy burden of solidarity on the international community. In providing a humanitarian response to such crisis situations, the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs and UNHCR had developed and continued to enjoy fruitful cooperation, which was the only means of dealing both with the complexity of the crises and the growing scarcity of resources. Such cooperation was carried out within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and in a number of complementary areas, the three major ones being early warning systems, consolidated appeals and emergency action focusing on economic recovery and development.

67. The establishment of an early warning system not only facilitated the monitoring of large-scale migration movements, but also made it possible to intervene before situations became critical. UNHCR was playing an active role in the monthly meetings of the working group responsible for dealing with the matter, which brought together the relevant United Nations agencies and ICRC. One of the first success stories achieved by that joint mechanism had been the prevention of large-scale famine in southern Africa in 1992. The rapid deployment of international assistance had prevented population movements that could have been fatal for the fragile countries of the region. Such preventive action was perhaps of no interest to lovers of sensationalism, but it was of capital importance for potential victims, as well as for the Governments concerned. UNHCR had adopted similar measures in Tajikistan and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was currently setting up structures along the same lines in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Early warning systems and preventive diplomacy were a particularly important component of the new international order outlined by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his Agenda for Peace.

68. Consolidated appeals, a procedure established under General Assembly resolution 46/182, were painstakingly prepared for by representatives of the organizations in the field, at the very heart of the emergencies that required action. They were an essential source of information and a precise indicator

of international solidarity. The donor countries must be thanked for their humanitarian commitment, although their response had varied, sometimes being rapidly forthcoming, sometimes late and, at all events, often insufficient. Of the 18 consolidated appeals launched since 1992 with an overall target of more than US\$ 4.5 billion, the resources collected for urgent needs had totalled only 55 per cent of that amount. The situation was a disturbing one, for it led to inequality in the treatment of victims. International public opinion tended to give preference, paradoxically, to certain crises at the expense of many other silent Sarajevos. As the High Commissioner and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had stated in the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations must not give discriminatory treatment to certain victims. Close cooperation was essential in that area as well, in view of the disturbing turn for humanitarian bodies taken by the structural shortage of resources, which, unfortunately, seemed to be increasing.

69. The third area of cooperation between the Department and UNHCR related to economic recovery and development: the search for lasting solutions to deal with the root causes of population movements. Emergency humanitarian assistance and economic recovery and development were two interrelated activities. Emergency humanitarian aid made it possible to restore public order and acceptable living conditions so as to promote economic development, which was the sole possible response in the long term. The two activities must be kept rigorously separate in terms of management, but emergency operations, if seen from the start from the standpoint of development, were capable of preventing population displacement and promoting the return of refugees and displaced persons. With regard to displaced persons, an area in which the cooperation between the Department and UNHCR was particularly welcome, the legal distinction between refugees and displaced persons was certainly important and necessary. In the field, however, in the heat of a crisis, it was often difficult, if not impossible, to preserve that distinction: the objective had to be to provide relief for all victims, irrespective of their legal status.

70. A final important area of partnership between the Department and UNHCR was that of the protection of humanitarian mandates in emergency situations. The action of the United Nations was increasingly becoming simultaneously political, military and humanitarian, in order to respond rapidly and appropriately to the proliferation of crises. Humanitarian action could save time at the start of a conflict, but it would never prevent one; it must therefore be backed up by political action in favour of the maintenance or restoration of peace, assuming, of course, that such political action did not jeopardize the independence, integrity and neutrality of humanitarian operations. The task was difficult: hence the fundamental need for coordination between the Department, UNHCR and the other bodies participating in such activities.

71. Mr. PAIVA (International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that shaping responses that were cohesive and constructive in the increasingly complex and compelling field of refugees and migration demanded coordinated action, drawing on the particular role and strengths of the agencies involved. IOM and UNHCR had been developing an effective dialogue along those lines since 1951, the year the two organizations had been created. In response to the Executive Committee's request in 1992, UNHCR had expanded its cooperation

with the international bodies dealing with refugee problems, particularly with IOM, which welcomed that encouraging development and reaffirmed its commitment to working closely with the Office of the High Commissioner and with the other members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

72. IOM had a mandate to ensure orderly migration processes worldwide. Yet population flows were increasingly of a mixed nature, generated by varying combinations of economic imbalance, ethnic conflict, natural disaster and political instability. The partnership between IOM and UNHCR should lend itself well to applying a variety of approaches to the complex nature of population flows. Resettlement activities continued to be a major field for interaction between IOM and UNHCR and were an excellent example of the evolving cooperation between the two organizations. Within the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, for example, the Orderly Departure Programme had gone from being a UNHCR programme in which IOM provided assistance to one that was fully under IOM's auspices. Similar transitions could be envisaged for other aspects of the Comprehensive Plan of Action. Another area of joint activity, voluntary repatriation, was becoming an increasingly real option in Afghanistan, South Africa, Chile and Viet Nam, inter alia. In all such activities, IOM supplemented the role of UNHCR with transport and technical assistance or with subsequent support for rehabilitation.

73. A person's decision to leave his country could be substantially affected by his awareness of realities and legal opportunities abroad. IOM and UNHCR were carrying out a joint programme for the dissemination of reliable information on such matters in Albania and were exploring the possibility of extending that model to other regions. In the newly independent States of the former Soviet Union, the two organizations were carrying out joint training programmes on the legal issues involved in migration and refugee affairs. Such programmes, which were designed to strengthen the capacity of new governmental structures, were critical to the effective future management of migration processes and directly concerned IOM's mandate. Lastly, in the field of migrant health, IOM and UNHCR had recently signed a cooperative agreement relating to the medical needs of victims of the conflict in Bosnia. They were working together in Sarajevo to institute a special medical programme to provide treatment opportunities abroad, free of charge, for individuals for whom care was not available locally. As could be seen, the potential, indeed the demand, for inter-agency collaboration was increasingly wide and varied, from both a functional and a geographical viewpoint. IOM looked forward to playing its role in that process.

74. Mr. O'DONNEL (United Nations Volunteers) said that specialists from the United Nations Volunteers worked with UNHCR in refugee reception, protection, transit and resettlement, arranged the voluntary resettlement or repatriation of refugees and helped them on the road to recovery and self-reliance. In 1993, about 100 specialists would serve with UNHCR, the largest single contingent being in the former Yugoslavia. In 1992, UNHCR and UNV had agreed on the establishment of a special sub-roster of candidates for emergency assignments. At any given time, a number of specialists could be deployed within a few days to areas where UNHCR was carrying out emergency activities.

That exemplary cooperation could be considerably expanded to involve other partners within the United Nations system, a prospect that had been fully endorsed by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

75. Reflecting a sad world of societies in turmoil, 1992 and 1993 had witnessed a rapid expansion in the number of United Nations Volunteers working in the humanitarian field. Specialists were now working in 36 countries and on over 100 humanitarian projects of agencies within the United Nations system. Many of those efforts had been facilitated by the global presence of UNDP, which administered the United Nations Volunteers, and by close cooperation with the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The support of member States had likewise been essential. A number of Governments had made contributions to finance the deployment of specialists to help in UNHCR's activities in the former Yugoslavia, Africa and South-East Asia. In the past two years, UNV had mobilized funds totalling over US\$ 8.5 million from over 10 different donor countries, but many crucial assignments were still without funding.

76. Citing examples of the humanitarian work carried out by the United Nations Volunteers, he said that an American field officer serving on the Kenyan-Somali border had transported refugees by truck to the Liboi refugee camp; a Peruvian field officer had helped over 38,000 displaced persons from Mali set up horticultural and livestock activities; two volunteers, one Japanese and one Ugandan, had provided assistance to victims of massive human rights violations in the former Yugoslavia; and an Irish volunteer had organized a network of support for 29 collective centres sheltering thousands of displaced persons and refugees in Sarajevo.

77. In cooperation with UNHCR, the United Nations Volunteers would like to expand its activities relating to participatory development and to link them to a network of community-level reconciliation resources for peace and development. Humanitarian relief could also be complemented by parallel peace-building efforts. The United Nations Volunteers could support such efforts in many ways: in helping to overcome confrontation and promoting communication, participation, civic education, mediation, negotiation and collective reconstruction. Whatever the area of activity might be, however, it was urgently necessary, in both human and financial terms, to ensure that humanitarian assistance rapidly achieved its goals at minimum cost and that the delivery of aid neither aggravated an emergency situation nor perpetuated dependency. From that point of view, the use of United Nations Volunteers represented a small investment with a large return in the satisfaction of basic human needs for millions of displaced and marginalized people.

78. Mr. BIZMARK (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking in exercise of the right of reply and referring to the statement by the observer for Iraq, said that his country welcomed with pleasure any individual who was shown to be Iranian. The Iranian Government was in contact with UNHCR in that regard.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.